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Objections against the Gospel refuted.

A

SERMON

PREACHED MARCH 4, 1829, AT THE INSTALLATION

OF THE

REV. JOHN BROWN, D. D.

AS PASTOR OF

PINE STREET CHURCH,

BOSTON.

BY DANIEL DANA, D. D.
Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Newburyport.

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SERMON.

Romans, i. 15, 16.

SO, AS MUCH AS IN ME IS, I AM READY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOU THAT ARE AT ROME ALSO. FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

THE great apostle had traversed sea and land, to spread the gospel of his adored Redeemer. Many a desolate region, and many a populous city had witnessed his unparalleled exertions in the holy cause. But as yet, he had never visited imperial Rome. Not that he overlooked that splendid, and populous, and guilty city. Not that he would treat it with neglect. He had repeatedly purposed to pay it a personal visit. Nor had repeated disappointments damped the ardor of his wishes. "I long to see you," says the good man, "that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established." "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So," he adds, "as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

The apostle had proclaimed the messages of heaven among the untaught and uncivilized; and encountered the fierceness of their opposition. But it was among the polished inhabitants of Athens, among learned civilians and philosophers, that he had met the keenest shafts of ridicule and scorn. He well knew, that amidst the highest cultivation of intellect, and refinement of manners, the heart, still unsubdued

to the love of truth, might only be stimulated and armed to new hostility against it. Such hostility he might naturally expect in the city of Rome. There were the great, the opulent, the luxurious, the learned, the philosophic, and the proud, who, if they agreed in nothing else, would too probably agree in despising and rejecting the gospel of Christ. But, says he, I am not ashamed of this gospel. I know that it is the power of God to salvation. I know that those who despise it, need it not less than others, and must perish without it. I know that there is a power which can bring even them to see its beauty, and taste its blessedness. And I know that the very things which provoke their contempt, constitute its chief excellence and glory. I will therefore preach it wherever I have access. I will preach it boldly, and plainly, and faithfully. I will preach it without softening any of its most offensive features. It was a noble resolution; worthy of an apostle, and worthy of every Christian minister.

The passage, viewed in this light, calls our attention to the leading objections which have been raised, in every age, against the gospel; particularly those objections which it has encountered in regions of learning and refinement; and which have frequently proved repulsive to cultivated and reflecting minds. To suggest and refute some of these objections, is the design of the present discourse.

The first objection of this character which I shall state, is the *unparalleled simplicity* of the gospel. Here is a book, professing to come from God, and to give information of the highest possible moment to man; information such as the profoundest sages and philosophers never could impart. Here is a scheme of salvation, claiming to have emanated from eternal wisdom; and to solve all the doubts, to remove all the difficulties, and provide for all the exigencies, of the case. We open the volume; we examine the scheme; and what do we find? No parade of philosophy; no investiga-

tions of science; no labored discussion of abstract principles; no formal distribution of topics; nothing, in short, remotely resembling a system of theology, or ethics, framed by man. All is plain, artless, unstudied, unadorned. A few simple points may be said to comprise the whole system. The incarnation of the Son of God; our redemption by his blood; our sanctification by his Spirit; our becoming interested in these stupendous blessings by faith; the unfailing connexion of this faith with universal holiness, with all pious affections, and all virtuous conduct—these principles, as obvious as they are important, constitute the essence of the grand scheme of our salvation. He who rightly understands them, possesses the key to the whole gospel, and to the whole system of its religion.

These principles, so simple in themselves, are conveyed to us with the utmost plainness of manner. The God of heaven, in his word, has mercifully adapted himself to the feebleness of our capacities, and to this infancy of our existence. Like a kind father, lisping with his children, he has given us heavenly truths in earthly language. Listening to his instructions with a childlike docility, we may be assured of finding the path to heaven. We need not fear a mistake in any essential point, either of truth or duty.

Shall this simplicity of the gospel offend and disgust us; or shall it fill us with admiration and gratitude? Shall it be viewed as a *defect*, or an *excellency* of the highest order? Does it not instamp on the gospel the character of divinity? Does it not proclaim that the Author of the universe is the Author of the Bible too?—In the works of man, an expensive and complicated machinery is frequently employed to accomplish a few inconsiderable results. While in the works of God, the most stupendous and diversified effects are frequently seen to spring from the operation of a single cause. It is in a few simple laws which govern matter and motion, that all the amazing and endless phenomena of this fair uni-

verse originate. Thus the Author of nature retires behind his own work, and permits himself to be seen only in the astonishing and ever varying *results* of his secret and silent operation.—In contemplating the wonderful law of *attraction*, which pervades the natural world, we are struck with nothing so much as the simplicity of the principle, combined with the immense extent and variety of its effects. How signally, in these respects, does it resemble that principle of *heavenly love* which pervades every department of the plan of our redemption, and which binds together the universe of holy souls.

One thing is most evident. Had the gospel come to us in an abstract and philosophic form; had it abounded with those investigations and abstrusities which please men of speculative minds; it would have been wholly unadapted to the generality of the race. Its grand object would have been lost. Most men want the talents, or the leisure, or the inclination, for subtile and laborious investigations. But they have minds to be informed. They have consciences and hearts to be addressed. And they have souls to be saved. Almost all the ancient religions mocked the great mass of their votaries with senseless fables, and reserved their secrets for philosophers. Christianity knows no such odious distinctions. It looks with equal eye on all. But it delights to descend to the lowest forms of humanity; to adapt itself to all their weaknesses and wants. The meek and lowly Saviour reveals the choicest secrets of his religion to *babes;* that is, to the docile and humble, however feeble their capacities, however unfurnished their minds.

But while we confess the unparalleled simplicity of the gospel, and glory in it, we deny that it is a meagre, uninstructive system. It is rich in truths equally profound and sublime. Each of its great principles, simple as it is in itself, opens boundless sources of thought, and leads the inquiring mind into a world of wonders. "We account the Scriptures of God," says the great Newton, "the most sublime philosophy."

Christianity, we admit, has its *mysteries*. And this has been a topic of complaint, even with those who, in the same breath, have complained of its simplicity. Let us attend, for a moment, to this objection.

That the gospel contains not only many things which unaided reason could never have discovered, but likewise many things which, when revealed, our minds cannot fully comprehend, is readily admitted. In this respect, the gospel is precisely similar to all the other works of God. Will any one deny that creation, in all its parts, abounds with incomprehensibles? Within and without us; above, beneath and around; in the vast and the minute of nature; in the animate and inanimate worlds; in the vegetable and mineral kingdoms; in our own bodies and souls; in their intimate connexion and mutual sympathy; we find exhaustless, inexplicable wonders. And shall the Book of God alone, that emanation of eternal wisdom, be entirely level to our capacities?

Other considerations bear still more directly on the point. The Bible comes to teach us something of God; something, too, which we have not learned before, and which nature could not teach. How natural, indeed how inevitable, that this *something* should be that of which we find in our minds no archetype. How natural, that it should be perfectly new and astonishing—utterly without the range of our previous thoughts and conceptions. And if, even when the object is presented, it is found too mighty for our feeble minds to grasp, shall this be thought strange? Shall it be made a reason for disbelief? We may then commence atheists at once. For natural religion, in presenting a God self-existent, eternal and omnipresent, places before us an object which we can neither distinctly conceive, nor fully comprehend.

And farther: the Bible comes to relieve us in a desperate case—in a case where all the efforts of reason, and the resources of philosophy, leave us without remedy and without

hope. We are sinners. And if sinners are saved, then either the divine law and government and glory must sink, or their salvation must come in a method strange, unsuspected, surprising, *mysterious*. This last is the real fact. The mysteries of the gospel, what are they, but so many vast resources of the Deity—so many grand achievements of infinite wisdom and love and condescension, in behalf of a ruined race?

Suppose the subjects of an earthly empire were perishing, by thousands, of some dire disease—a disease so singular as to admit no relief, unless administered by one in the same lowly station with the sufferers. Suppose the sovereign himself, touched with their woes, should abandon his palace, and concealing his person beneath the meanest attire, should visit their hospitals and their hovels; should familiarize himself with the most disgusting forms of their wretchedness, that he might give health to the diseased, and life to the dying. What celebrations could equal such condescension? And what would be the *ingratitude* of refusing to such a sovereign his proper dignities and honors; of denying that he ever possessed them; and this under the pretence that the condescension was incredible—was absolutely impossible?

To believe what we cannot completely comprehend, and to act on that belief, is neither irrational, nor at variance with daily and universal practice. Of the proper nature of diseases, of medicines, and of the process of cure, physicians know almost nothing; and the great mass of mankind, absolutely nothing at all. Yet men know themselves to be diseased; remedies are prescribed and applied; and cures are effected; just as if all were plain and understood. And if *reason* be the highest prerogative of man, the highest prerogative of reason itself is to believe whatever the God of truth has revealed, and to believe it on his simple testimony.

It is objected against the gospel, that it is, throughout, of a *humbling* character and tendency. It frowns indignantly on

every form of human pride. It strips us of that self-valuation in which some have placed the essence of dignity, and of virtue.

All this we readily admit. The gospel is indeed a humbling system. It originated in the free and self-moved mercy of God. Every where it takes it for granted that man is a sinner, a rebel against his Maker; that sin is a tremendous evil, and deserves an awful and endless punishment. It offers an undeserved salvation; a salvation spurned by the proud, and welcomed only by the humble. It inspires a spirit of self-abasement. To this point tend all its doctrines, all its precepts, all its promises, all its denunciations.

This, we contend, is not the gospel's reproach, but its honor; its prime excellence. It is fit that the pride of our hearts should be humbled; that all human glory should be laid in dust, and God alone exalted. Why so reluctant to take our proper place as sinners? What satisfaction, what real honor, in bearing about a bold front, as if we had no guilt to confess, and no pardon to implore? And what is that bright moment in which the first gleam of real joy finds its way to the heart? It is the moment when it begins to be humble—when, abandoning all its proud pretensions, and self-justifying pleas, it casts itself on the infinite compassion, the sovereign mercy of an offended, yet forgiving God. Then peace and hope and pardon come. Then an air of heaven breathes on the heart, before desolate and wretched. Then the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, comes down and dwells in the happy soul.

If, my hearers, the heaven of Christianity is a heaven of *perfect humility;* if there, none is great but God; if saints and angels combine to lose themselves in ascribing glory to their Eternal King; if this is the very essence of their felicity; then *let us look well to our religion.* A religion which does not make us genuinely humble; which leaves the pride and self-sufficiency of our hearts unsubdued; which perhaps affords nutriment and strength to these hateful dispo-

sitions; is not the religion we want. It may flatter us; but it will flatter to betray, and to destroy. In the arrogance of our minds, we may hope to scale the heavens; to force our way, through cherubim and a flaming sword, to the tree of life; but the attempt will be as abortive, as it is impious.

If to these momentous considerations, any thing could be superadded, we might say, that pride is the grand foe, even of temporal enjoyment. Shooting up within us in baleful luxuriance, it finds its way, by a thousand ramifications, to every source of human comfort, and infuses bitterness and poison into them all. What but pride renders us dissatisfied with Providence; discontented with our lot; restless in prosperity; wretched in adversity? Poverty, unkindness, neglect, reproach, disappointment, all have their stings; but they might all be repelled, or evaded, did not our own pride acuminate and direct them to the heart. The proud man is a perfect *sensitive plant*, shrinking from every touch, and shrivelled by every breeze. Or, to use the more expressive language of Scripture, he is *like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* O how kind is that gospel, which, designing to restore us to peace, aims its mortal blow at the grand *enemy* of our peace. Not content with the tedious process of cutting off the streams, it dries up the very fountain by which they are supplied. It makes us humble.

In this great point the gospel stands alone. Almost all the ancient systems of philosophy and ethics leave the pride of the human heart unsubdued and unassailed. The philosophers of Greece and Rome seem to have regarded the task as too hardy, and too hopeless. Nor had they weapons to attack this giant sin with any prospect of success. Indeed, the enemy had a citadel in their own breasts. All their views on the subject were indistinct and confused. That they had not so much as a speculative idea of *humility*, as a virtue, is evident from their language, in which they confounded it with

meanness and *abjectness of spirit.* In how many Christian communities do the same sentiments and language prevail. We so often hear of an *honest* pride, a *noble* pride, a *generous* pride, and even a *necessary* pride, that we almost forget that pride in all its forms is hateful. While to great numbers, humility and meekness convey no idea, but that of a tame, spiritless, servile character. It is time that our language were reformed. And surely it is time that our sentiments on topics of vital interest were assayed and corrected by the standard of the gospel.

We proceed to consider another objection against this divine system; an objection drawn from its *unyielding*, *unassimilating* character. The gospel pays little regard to the factitious distinctions of society. It bends not to the maxims of worldly policy, nor to the caprices of fashion, nor to the refinements of polished life, nor to the lax morality of a dissipated age. It is equally unaccommodating to the speculations of philosophy; nor will it modify its principles, in compliment to any imaginary or real improvements in art, or science, or literature. On all these points, the fact is confessed. And may not Christianity, in each case, be completely justified?

It never was designed, surely, to interfere with the wholesome order of society, nor to trample down its salutary distinctions. It renders to all their dues. It pays a decent respect to station and rank. But it connects with them, too, peculiar duties and responsibilities. It faithfully warns them of peculiar dangers. Not unfrequently it dispenses its smiles and rewards by rules exactly the reverse of those which obtain in the world. It plucks the laurel from the brow of the ambitious, ruthless conqueror, to place it on the head of the humble man, who subdues his own passions, and is content to do good in silence. In short, it approves, it loves, it honors, it rewards nothing but SIMPLE GOODNESS. It passes by, with mortifying indifference, the schemes of statesmen, the exploits of heroes, and the learned labors of mere scholars

and philosophers. It even blasts with its deadliest frown the admired productions of prostituted genius, and perverted talents; consigning their authors to the depths of infamy and shame. Is not Christianity then the best friend of individuals, and of society?

Among the multitudes who acknowledge the general excellence of the morality of the gospel, there are not a few who think it unnecessarily strict and precise. Many a man engaged in traffick, who would not be thought destitute of a conscience, reconciles himself to occasional, and not unfrequent deviations. Yet who sees not that this very strictness, were it but universally practised, would shed the happiest influence, not only on all commercial transactions, but on the whole intercourse of society.—Many a grave politician, too, deems the morality of the Bible, however useful to individuals, altogether inconvenient to states; and without scruple sacrifices the *right* to the *expedient*. Narrow, shortsighted, wretched policy! Cannot the interests of our country be supported without violating the eternal laws of heaven? Then let them sink. But what man of reason and reflection can for a moment suspect it? Were the Fathers of New England mere novices and drivellers, in regarding the Bible as their pole-star, and the interests of religion and virtue as the main concern? Let the profusion of blessings poured on them by indulgent Heaven, declare. Let the fair and rich patrimony which they have transmitted to us, declare. When, when shall we behold the delightful spectacle of a whole nation imbibing the spirit of Christianity, and regulating by the principles of eternal truth, its policy, its laws, its administration at home, and its intercourse abroad? Would such a nation sink to a mean and degraded condition? Would it not be the happiest, the most dignified nation on which the sun looks down? Would not its example point out to a gazing, admiring world, the path to real prosperity, and happiness, and glory?

In commercial and populous cities, accumulated wealth never fails to induce luxury, dissipation, and an excessive rage for amusement. Pleasure spreads her snares, and is pursued through all her varied haunts. With thousands, amusement becomes the habitual pursuit, and the grand end of life. The gospel comes, and speaks to these triflers, of death, of judgment, of interminable joys and woes. It reminds them that they were not sent into the world to be amused; but to serve God and man, and to prepare for the high destinies of eternity. It warns them that a life of levity is a life of guilt; that many of their chosen pleasures pollute the imagination, and corrupt the heart; and that the most innocent, if pursued as a business, enervate the mind, banish serious thought, and close the soul against God and religion. And it faithfully warns them of the folly, the madness, the ruin of dreaming away those precious, fleeting moments on which their salvation depends. But in thus calling them off from the mere *phantoms* of enjoyment, it does not leave them without resource. It invites them to the fountain of pure and everlasting felicity. It bids them possess pleasures real, rational, elevated, unfailing—the unknown delight of opening the heart in love to God, and love to man—the luxury of doing good—the joy of an approving conscience—the transport of Christian hope—the sublime, heart thrilling anticipation of happiness beyond the grave.

In an advanced state of society, and especially in the circles of opulence and refinement, it is apt to be discovered that the principles and laws of Christianity, however suitable to the vulgar, are less adapted to informed and polished minds. A new code is introduced; and the general homage transferred to a new sovereign, termed Fashion. And truly, the pretensions of this new sovereign are far from modest. Not content with prescribing laws to dress, to equipage, to the intercourse of society, to the exterior of manners, she claims to mould and govern the very essence of manners,

and of morals and religion too. As a substitute for the rigid and repulsive system of the gospel, she prescribes a soft and easy religion; a religion which has little to disgust the proud, the worldly, the gay, or the voluptuous. And shall Christianity, the daughter of the skies, bend in homage to this earth-born, self-created sovereign? Shall her consecrated ministers descend from their elevation, and unite with the thoughtless crowd in their worship of the idol? Shall they, with inverted ambition, court the world's smile,

> By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour?

Shall they, in compliance with the popular whim, preach a religion which alarms no conscience; which neither mortifies nor disturbs the latent corruptions of the heart; which scarcely gives to open vice a blush, or a fear? Or shall they, in the face of opposition, of ridicule, of scorn, dare preach the gospel—the gospel in its naked simplicity—the gospel in its uncompromising strictness?

But reason and philosophy, not less than fashion, prefer their claims; and frequently have arrayed themselves with a still more formidable front, against the religion of the gospel. Not that we admit that between the gospel and *genuine* philosophy, there is the least discrepance. Our religion courts inquiry. It shrinks not from the most rigid investigation. From the very hottest furnace of genuine criticism, it has ever come forth uninjured, brightened, and triumphant. Yet there is a spirit of bold speculation, in which it cannot be approached without a degree of impiety. Surely it will not be denied, that there are certain great points on which the Scripture speaks a language explicit, unequivocal and decisive. Nor can it be less clear, that in every such case, nothing remains to mortals, but implicit belief and acquiescence. To demur, on points like these; to subject them to the ordeal of our own reason, what is it, but to call in question the wisdom of the Eternal, to rejudge his judgment, and

deny his truth? What is it, but to renounce the benefit of Revelation, to renounce Revelation itself, and plunge in the cheerless, shoreless gulf of skepticism and infidelity?

To instance, for a moment, in the great question of the future state of the wicked. That their punishment will be properly endless, we have precisely the same evidence from Scripture, as of the endless felicity of the righteous. The point being thus definitively settled, and by the only competent tribunal, should it not be for ever put to rest? Shall we unsettle our own minds, or the minds of others, in a point of such vital importance, by any plausible reasonings which go to diminish the evil of sin, and to mitigate its punishment?— To estimate the evil, and the desert of sin, may it not be needful that we should know, more fully than we can possibly know in the present state, the excellencies of the Being it offends, the perfection of the law it violates, and its own malignant aspects, tendencies, and actual consequences, as they regard both this and other worlds? Is it wise, in a point of such moment, to call in the imagination and the passions, to blind the judgment? Who but God himself can certainly know what he will do with his offending creatures? When he has made and declared his decision, shall man call it into question? Is it doing honor to the Sovereign of the world, to suppose that he will decide the final states of men by other rules, than those he has explicitly proclaimed? Shall selfish mortals arrogate to themselves to be more merciful than their Creator? Shall criminals ascend the judgment seat, and pronounce sentence in their own case? We may ask farther: shall the spiritual physician administer poison, because it is sweet? Shall he confine himself to opiates, because they give present ease? Shall the victim of fatal disease be soothed and flattered, when the hand of death is upon him? Shall the spiritual watchman, whose first duty it is, to warn the wicked, decline the merciful warning? Shall

he, by crying peace, till destruction comes, incur the guilt of cruelty—the guilt of blood?

While the gospel resists the efforts of reason and philosophy to disprove or conceal its doctrines, it refuses to be modified by them. Attempts of this kind have been witnessed in every age. Men of subtile and speculating minds, perhaps friends to the gospel, but not perfectly reconciled to the simplicity of its doctrines, have aimed to improve and to recommend them, by heterogeneous mixtures of their own. Indeed, there is something plausible in the attempt to show that all the philosophy and logic and learning in the world are capable of being pressed into the service of religion. In a qualified sense, this is even the fact. But there is another fact which has been too much overlooked. These auxiliaries, however useful and efficient in arraying the evidences of Christianity, and establishing its truth, have much less to do in expounding its doctrines. Here, their office is altogether subordinate. And when they forget their humble station and duty; when, instead of submissively inquiring what the Author of the Bible has taught, they assume to show what he ought to teach, they forfeit every claim to confidence. Their light becomes darkness, and their wisdom, mere hallucination. We undervalue not the rich and splendid contributions of learning to the cause of piety. From geography and geology, from researches in ancient history, from the various manuscripts and versions, from erudite criticism, the most important confirmation has arisen to the truth and divinity of the Bible. These weapons, once ostentatiously brandished on the side of infidelity, have been triumphantly wrested from its hands, and employed with effect in defence of the Scriptures. But the grand and most interesting doctrines of the Bible are found on the very surface of its pages. They claim to be seen by their own light, and to rest on their own peculiar principles. They borrow no aid from human phi-

losophy; no splendor from human eloquence. They ask no recommendation, but from their own unadorned simplicity and beauty.

But it may be asked, perhaps, Is not this an age of great and unexampled improvements? Is not the human mind on its rapid march to perfection? Has not a flood of light recently burst upon the world? Amidst the improvements of art, and the not less astonishing revolutions of science, shall religion alone remain stationary? Since in other sciences, many principles have long been received as truths, which have ultimately been exploded as errors; and many truths, long latent, have by time and investigation, been brought to light, may not a similar process be expected in religion? May not many of its first principles remain yet undiscovered? And may not many points which the most enlightened Christians now hold as truths, be exploded, in some age of superior illumination, as so many errors and falsehoods?

Our reply to these questions is simple and brief. The arts and sciences are inventions of man. What man invents, as it is of course imperfect, he may improve; and he may improve without end. Religion is a revelation from God. Like its Author, it is perfect, and is incapable of improvement. It admits no change, no progress, no diminution, no addition. Christianity was complete and consummate in its very infancy. Or rather, it had no infancy. Like the first parent of the human race, it came from the hand of its Author, mature in all its faculties; perfect in all its attributes. By every past attempt to improve it, it has only been deteriorated and debased. Nor is any thing better to be anticipated for the future. Far sooner might weak, aspiring mortals hope to add lustre to the sun, or beauty and order to this fair and well adjusted creation, than to improve, by the refinements of learning and philosophy, that religion which has

come to us direct from heaven, and which, in all its features, bears the impress of its perfect and divine Author.

We admit, indeed, that in one great instance, Christianity has undergone a process of *reformation*. But what was that reformation, other than the removal of the dust and rubbish, the ignorance, and error, and gross superstition, which during a night of a thousand years, had been gathering around the religion of Christ? In other words, what was it, but a return, or more properly, an approximation, to the grand elementary principles of this divine religion, and to the simplicity and purity of its earliest and best days?

It has been objected against Christianity, that it is rigid, indeed impracticable, in its demands; that it enjoins a purity absolutely incompatible with our present state of being; in fine, that it permits us to rest in nothing short of absolute perfection.

That the gospel erects a lofty standard of morals; that its claims in point of purity are large; that it bids us aim even at perfection; is not denied. That it enjoins any duties which are, strictly speaking, impracticable, is not admitted. On the whole, we have a right to contend, that the objection itself stamps the religion of the Bible with a character of excellence utterly unparalleled, and even unapproached, in any other system of morals or religion which the world has seen.

From the very constitution of the human mind, it results, that in order to the actual attainment of even a moderate degree of moral excellence, the aims must be large and elevated. No man ever rises higher than the standard which he proposes to himself. The universal tendency is, to fall below such a standard. Had Christianity embraced in its system of morals, the allowance of a single sin, the defect would have been fatal. A single sin indulged is like a gangrene, which gradually and surely spreads its deleterious influence through the whole system. The gospel, in pro-

posing nothing less than perfection, as the object of our pursuit, has effectually provided for our arriving at lofty attainments. The object being grand and sublime, there is an inspiration imparted to the very aim.

Farther: let it be considered that if the gospel standard is high, and its duties arduous, its *motives* likewise are motives of immense and indescribable force. Take, for instance, the high demands it makes upon us respecting love to our enemies, and forgiveness of injuries. What duties can be harder than these, to flesh and blood? How do all the hateful propensities of our nature rise in arms against them. But behold the Saviour. Remember that the simple feeling which brought him down from heaven to earth, was love; all-conquering, unconquerable love, to enemies and to rebels —and *we* were those enemies and rebels. Behold him on the cross. See those eyes raised to heaven in pity for his unrelenting crucifiers. And hear that voice: FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO. And now, does not every feeling of resentment and revenge die within you at once? Do you find it hard to forgive, to love, the unkindest enemy you ever had? Or do you find it easy, delightful, inevitable?

But beside the all-powerful motives, there are all-powerful *aids* too. Nothing is to be done, nothing is to be attempted, by the power of unassisted nature. A HOLY SPIRIT offers his mild, but effectual influence, to subdue every corruption, to inspire every holy disposition, to excite, to strengthen, and carry into act, every virtuous purpose. This HEAVENLY FRIEND is ever at hand; nay more, is ever within us, if we are Christians; waiting to impart his sacred influence, and more ready to bestow, than we to ask it. How inestimably precious is this provision of eternal mercy. What a sovereign antidote against despondence. What an exhaustless spring of high designs, of holy resolutions, of strenuous efforts; of

untiring, unconquerable zeal and perseverance in the path of duty.

In fine : as holiness, and holiness alone, is the happiness of intelligent and immortal beings, it follows, that to require it, in the largest measures, and by the most imperious obligations, is only to impose on us the duty of being sublimely and exquisitely happy. Shall this, in our Creator, be deemed unkind? Shall it be made a topic of complaint? What would a license to sin be, but an invitation to be miserable? Is there a soul that has begun to escape the iron bondage of corruption, that does not sigh and long for complete deliverance? Is there a heart that has known the ardors of heavenly love, that does not pant to be all inflamed with the sacred passion? Is there a saint in glory who would wish his obligations to holiness relaxed? Is there a seraph who "adores and burns" around the throne of God, who would consent to be less firmly bound to that throne? And what are the highest attainments of Christians on earth, but feeble approximations to the purity and bliss of the celestial state?

Time will permit us to consider but a single additional objection against Christianity. By many it has been thought to conceal within itself the seeds of *enthusiasm*, and to impart this mischievous spirit to its votaries.

Enthusiasm properly denotes an excessive mental excitement; an extravagant ardor of feeling. To determine, therefore, its existence in any given case, we must first estimate the feelings excited, the object to which they are directed, and their relative proportion or disproportion.

To those who, devoted to the cares, the business, the amusements, or the ambitions of the world, regard religion as a secondary thing, the deep and absorbing interest of its real votaries must naturally appear extravagant. To those whose faith in the Scriptures is feeble and vacillating, the settled,

earnest conviction of those who attach to them a divine and all-controlling authority, must seem misplaced and delusive. Those who think it of little importance what a man believes, will consider the zeal which is expended in defence of the truth, a mere waste of time and temper. Those who view all pretensions to vital piety as craft, or delusion, will view the friends of vital piety as either unsound at heart, or touched in the brain. Those who hope to see heaven without conversion, will regard all serious concern about conversion, as a needless trouble. Those who feel no anxieties for the spiritual interests and prospects of their neighbors and fellow-countrymen, will view the anxieties of others as gloomy and absurd; and their endeavors to arouse them, as officious and unkind. Those who perceive little need of a public reformation of manners, will regard the advocates of the cause as righteous overmuch. Those who believe that the heathen can live happily and die safely, without the gospel, will not think highly of the wisdom of employing great exertion or expense to evangelize them.

But there are other views of the subject. What, my beloved hearers, if religion be in fact the grand, all-important object of life; which being secured, all is secured; which being lost, all is lost? What if the Bible be indeed the word of the Eternal God; written by his inspiration, and stamped with all his authority? What if its truths, so obnoxious to human pride, and human depravity; so disgusting to the nice and sickly palate of a polished age; furnish the only medicine for the diseases of the mind? And what if the wilful rejection of these truths should prove, in its very nature, an act of self-exclusion from everlasting blessings? What if those despised things, *conversion*, a *new heart*, *faith in a crucified Redeemer*, should prove the only passports to heaven? What if a life spent in thoughtless gaiety, or in anxious devotion to the world, in neglect of God, of prayer, of the soul, though

not stained with gross vice, should terminate in bitterness, and anguish, and despair? What if every human being be absolutely bound to make, not only his own spiritual interests, but the spiritual interests of others too, the objects of his grand and habitual concern? What if a general reformation of manners, and the preservation of religious institutions in their purity, be the only means of saving our free and favored country from going down to the common grave of republics? What if the heathen really and pressingly need the gospel at our hands; and what if, in case we withhold it, they will bitterly upbraid us before the tribunal of God?

One thing is certain. If religion be not the grand object; if the immortal interests of ourselves and others be not the chief concern; we must wholly change our estimate of numbers of our race, who have ever been regarded as lights of the world, and ornaments of their species. And can it be, that Abraham, in quitting all that is dear to man, that he might become an heir to brighter worlds, and a blessing to distant ages, was chargeable with weakness and folly? Were the apostles, in leaving their little all for their Saviour, content with toil and suffering; content with a martyr's crown—were they ignorant of the true value and end of life? Was Paul a weak enthusiast, when, with the ardor and rapidity of a seraph, he explored distant regions and seas, encountering every form of danger, and suffering, and toil; anxious only that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus?

But it is while looking at that Saviour himself; to the heaven from which he came down; to the garden in which he agonized; to the cross on which he expired; to the matchless LOVE which prompted the whole—that we get the brightest views of the worth of the soul, the worth of religion, and our own obligations of entire self-devotion to its interests. With these objects full in view, we shall feel how *unworthy*

we are of the charge of *enthusiasm*. Our warmest love to such a Saviour will seem cold; our liveliest gratitude, ungrateful; and our tenderest pity for our fellow sinners, a species of guilty apathy. We may lament, indeed, that our exertions for our Saviour are not animated by purer motives, by simpler aims, by more of his own heavenly meekness and humility; but never, never can we suspect that they can reach an ardor worthy of the cause. Nor will we fear that, on the bed of death, we shall regret any thing that we have done, or suffered, or sacrificed, for Christ and his church.

Reverend and dear Brother,

Providence has changed your place, but not your duty. In transferring you from that distant sphere in which you have, for years, delighted to preach the gospel of your Saviour, it bids you preach the same gospel in the midst of this great and flourishing metropolis. This, we doubt not, is your fixed and unalterable purpose. Convinced, by all your observation and experience, as well as by the testimony of Heaven, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation, you will never, never be *ashamed* of it. Convinced that its most offensive truths are pre-eminently kind and salutary; that they humble to exalt; that they wound to heal and save; you will neither conceal nor disguise them. You will not cease to proclaim them in all their simplicity and energy.

And charged with a *gracious* message, you will deliver it with a grace. The love of Jesus, your favorite theme, will enliven every sermon, and perfume every prayer. It will impart tenderness to your aspect, heavenly compassion to your feelings, and an unaffected, winning kindness to all your demeanor.

Coming to your new charge in this spirit, you may hope to bring blessings with you. To some, indeed, your preaching

will too probably be a *savor of death unto death;* but to others it will be a *savor of life unto life.* You may not carry the crowd; but you will lead a humble and happy few to their Saviour, and to heaven. You may not receive the plaudit of the licentious and the gay; but the blessing of souls ready to perish shall come upon you. You may not dazzle the world; but you shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

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